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The United Nations fears for staff as Nepal strikes continue

Following is a report published in Reuters AlertNet based on an interview of Mr. Robert Piper, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator of UN System in Nepal by Delhi base correspondent Nita Bhalla.



UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator Mr. Robert Piper. (File Photo: UNIC).

NEW DELHI, 3 July: More frequent and violent strike action in Nepal is threatening the security of United Nations staff and undermining their humanitarian operations, the head of the U.N. operation said on Friday.

In recent years, Nepal has seen a sharp rise in the number of strikes where everything including transport, government offices, private businesses, schools, hospitals and markets are completely shut down.

Last year, there were 254 days of strikes or "bandhs" in the country, according to Nepalbandh.com, a Nepali website that monitors strikes around the country. In the last three months, there have been more than 200 strikes, according to the site.

Robert Piper, Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for the U.N. team in Nepal, said strike action was seriously impacting the organisation's work while a rise in intimidation and violence during the strikes were of great concern. "Our people are moving around the country - doing activities such as food distributions or human rights monitoring - and they are constantly being stopped by road blockages, burning tyres and mobs of people who are increasingly refusing to let them pass," he told AlertNet in an interview. "As a result, the U.N.'s work is dramatically curtailed on bandh days and as the bandhs become more violent, we are getting more concerned about staff security."



Protesters are seen through burning tyres during a general strike in Kathmandu in June. REUTERS/Shruti Shrestha

ATTACKS

Nepal is reeling from a 10-year civil conflict that ended in 2006. The Maoist insurgency killed more than 13,000 people, displaced hundreds of thousands and devastated the economy.

The U.N. Development Programme's 2007/8 Human Development Index ranks Nepal 142 out of 177 countries, where more than 30 percent of the population live below the poverty line. The United Nations has 2,300 staff working in Nepal but recent attacks on U.N. vehicles and on staff has

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Radio Chautari on Air

UN Radio Nepal

Listen: http://unic.un.org/kathmandu

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left the organisation considering scaling down staff activities during strikes.

In recent months, U.N. vehicles have been attacked. One vehicle was stoned, the backlights of a bus carrying staff to work in the Kathmandu Valley were smashed and a brick was thrown through the back window of vehicle carrying human rights monitors.

Piper said there have been about six such attacks on vehicles since January. Staff members have also been subjected to violence, said Piper, adding that a U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF) employee was "roughed up" by a group in Kathmandu as he drove a U.N. motorcycle on a bandh day just 11 days ago.

"If the bandhs continue on the current trend, we will have to shift to essential staff only - a sort of skeleton staff operation - on bandh days and this could mean a reduction of at least 50 percent of our staff on duty on the day of an event."

HITTING THE POOR

As the strikes hit the $180 million-a-year U.N. operation in Nepal, Piper said it was the most vulnerable people who were being hurt the most.

Trucks carrying food to some of the poorest populations have been held up for five to 10 days at a time. A leprosy programme by the World Health Organisation and an emergency seed distribution by the Food and Agriculture Organisation were both delayed. And human rights monitors can't get to where they need to go to do their work.

Piper said the indirect impact on vulnerable populations was equally worrying as education and other areas are hit. Children and teachers can't get to class because of the strikes.

Last year, children in some areas of Nepal's Terai region missed 125 school days - half of the entire school year, he added.

Strike action has also affected food prices in the country as fuel and other supplies are blocked. According to the United Nations, this goes part of the way to explaining why food prices have risen 17 percent so far this year despite global food prices falling.

Piper said Nepal's strike culture was a symptom of larger governance problems - lack of accountability, weak structures in the country to address grievances and deteriorating law and order. "There is a general absence of mechanisms by which grievances are expressed and negotiations undertaken in a peaceful manner," he said. "Taking to the streets and burning tyres tends to be the opening pitch in the negotiation process rather than the last resort."

Least Developed Countries Focuses on the State and Development Governance - UNCTAD Report Launch

Kathmandu, 16 July: UN Information Centre (UNIC) launched the least Developed Countries (LDCs) Report 2009 amid the presence of the media. Former Vice Chairman of Nepal's National Planning Commission Dr. Shankar Prasad Sharma presented the report titled "The State and Development Government".



Right: Dr. Shankar Sharma, former Vice Chairman of Nepal's National Planning Commission and UNIC National Information Officer Mr. Ram Babu Shah during the launching of the UNCTAD's Report 2009 on Least Developed Countries titled: The State and Development Governance on 16 July 2009. Photo: UNIC

This Report argues that the impact of the global economic crisis is likely to be so severe in LDCs that "business as usual" is no longer possible. The crisis offers both the necessity and an opportunity for change. Coping with the impact of the crisis in LDCs will require dedicated policy action and resource flows, including from the international community. But beyond this, new policy approaches are necessary to ensure that development after the crisis will be more resilient and more inclusive.

The Least Developed Countries (LDCs) are a group of countries that have been classified by the United Nations as least developed in terms of their low GDP per capita, their weak human assets and their high degree of economic vulnerability.

See Full Report => http://www.unctad.org/Templates/WebFlyer.asp?intItemID=4952&lang=1

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United Nations Millennium Campaign Logo Unveiled



Honorable Minister of Federal Affairs, Constitutional Assembly Parliamentary & Cultural Affairs Dr. Minendra Rijal speaking after unveiling the LOGO of the UN Millennium Campaign logo. Photo: UNIC

Kathmandu, 28 July: A ceremony marking the opening of the new logo of the United Nations Millennium Campaign (UNMC) in Nepal was held in the UN House on 28 July 2009. The ceremony was attended by Honorable Minister of Federal Affairs, Constituent Assembly Parliamentary & Cultural Affairs Dr. Minendra Rijal, Honourable Constituent Assembly Member Mr. Gagan Thapa, Deputy Directory and Head of Asia and Pacific Region, UNMC Mr Minar Pimple and General Secretary of NGO Federation Ms. Sharmila Karki.

Minister Dr. Mirendra Rijal mentioned increment on health and education budget terming the increase as the government's efforts, among others, to meet MDGs. "We have made progress in reducing maternal and child mortality", he said.

Millennium Development Goal

In 2006, 23 million people stood up, in 2007, 47 million people, last year 116 million people Stood Up and Took Action against Poverty and for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The MDGs are a set of eight specific, time-bound, measurable goals that aim to eradicate extreme poverty by 2015. These are: (1) eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; (2) achieve universal primary education; (3) promote gender equality and women empowerment; (4) reduce child mortality; (5) improve maternal health; (6) combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; (7) ensure environmental sustainability; and (8) develop a global partnership for development. 189 member-countries of the United Nations - including Nepal- committed themselves to these eight goals in the Millennium Declaration of 2000.

The Stand Up campaign is a global mobilization that aims to gather people around the world in sending a loud message to world leaders to deliver on their commitment on the MDGs. With only six years left before the 2015 deadline, the message has to be louder, clearer and with utmost urgency.

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Educate Girls – End poverty Celebrating World Population Day



Ms. Ugochi Daniels, UNFPA Deputy Representative addressing participants in the Programme at the National Health Training Center. Photo: UNFPA



World Population Day walkathon. Photo: UNFPA

Kathmandu, 11 July: Women are economic agents who invest their earnings into raising healthier and better-educated children. Progress in social and economic development goes hand-in-hand with gender equality. No investment in development costs so little as family planning and brings benefits that are so far-reaching, such as creating conditions that enable women to enter the labour force and families to devote more resources to each child, thereby improving family nutrition, education levels and living standards.

This year witnessed the 20th World Population Day. The Day's inception in 1989 by the then UNDP Governing Council prompted its endorsement by the United Nations General Assembly as an opportunity to build better awareness of population issues and their relation to development. This year the theme was 'Responding to the Economic Crisis: Investing in Women is a Smart Choice'.

In Kathmandu UNFPA celebrated the day with Nepal SBI Bank by organizing a walkathon from Babar Mahal to Jawalkhel and a fair at the ground next to the zoo. The Ministry of Health and Population organized a National Inaugural Programme at the National Health Training Center with the participation of Minister for Health and Population Umakanta Chaudhary and other senior officials at the ministry.

District Development Committees and District Health Offices in Dadeldhura, Dang, Kapilvastu, Rautahat, Mahottari and Saptari organized various activities such as speech contest, essay contest, cricket match, street drama, radio drama and interactions.

UN News

UNFPA supports 2nd National Youth Assembly



Participants in 2nd National Youth Assembly. Photo: UNFPA



Kathmandu, 17 July: Association of Youth Organizations Nepal (AYON) and Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS) conducted the 2nd National Youth Assembly in Kathmandu, 15-17 July 2009. An inspiration for the theme- 'Coming into Action'- was the national commitment towards the MDGs and the ICPD (International Conference on Population and Development Plan of Action). The National Youth Assembly was supported by UNFPA, Save the Children, Alliance for Peace and Ujyaalo Network.

Three hundred youth, youth political leaders and supporters from all over Nepal gathered in Kathmandu to formulate action plans on various youth issues. These plans along with the names of the monitoring committees were handed over to Hon. Ganesh Nepali, Minister of Youth and Sports. The participants were also invited to the residence of President Dr. Ram Baran Yadav, who stressed on the fact that the youth were the future and the pillars of the nation. Dr. Yadav also asked them to send him a copy of their recommendations and assured them that he would do his best to ensure and support the implementation of the action plans.

Prior to the National Assembly AYON organized five Regional Youth Summits (RYS).

UN Calendar August

09 Aug: International Day Of The World's Indigenous People

By resolution 49/214 of 23 December 1994, the General Assembly decided to celebrate the International Day of the World's Indigenous People on 9 August every year during the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. In 2004 the Assembly proclaimed a Second International Decade by resolution 59/174. The goal of this Decade is to further strengthen international cooperation for the solution of problems faced by indigenous people in such areas as culture, education, health, human rights, the environment, and social and economic development.

URL: http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/indigenous

12 Aug: International Youth Day

The General Assembly on 17 December 1999 in its resolution 54/120, endorsed the recommendation made by the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth (Lisbon, 8-12 August 1998) that 12 August be declared International Youth Day. The Assembly recommended that public information activities be organized to support the Day as a way to promote better awareness of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, adopted by the General Assembly in 1995 (resolution 50/81).

URL: http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/iyouthday.htm

23 Aug: International Day For The Remembrance Of The Slave Trade And Its Abolition

The International Day for the Abolition of Slavery recalls the date of the adoption, by the General Assembly, of the United Nations Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others [Resolution 317 (IV) of 2 December 1949]. The International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and Its Abolition is celebrated every 23rd of August.

UN News

Regional High Level Rainwater Harvesting meeting held in Kathmandu



Distinguished guests of High level Rainwater Harvesting Meeting. Photo: UN-HABITAT

Kathmandu, 30 July: The Ministry of Physical Planning and Works of Nepal organized a Regional High-level Meeting on Rainwater Harvesting in association with UN-HABITAT, Helvetas, Rain Foundation/BSPN, Government of Finland, Plan Nepal, RWSSFDB, Water Aid, WHO, Coca Cola and other sector partners from 28-30 June 2009 in Kathmandu. This meeting has helped to support the initiatives taken in the fifteenth SAARC Summit held in Colombo in August 2008 where the summit declaration had re-emphasized the need to harness rainwater for development and sustainability and had urged countries to take appropriate action.

The programme was inaugurated on 28 June 2009 by Honorable Prime Minister Mr. Madhav Kumar Nepal. Addressing the programme, he told that the utilization of rain water as a renewable source is very important in the context of growing requirements of Nepal. In his opinion, rain water can be a very feasible and convenient option for daily water use. He believed that rainwater can be a viable source of water supply in hills and urban areas to lessen the problem of water scarcity and added that there is an immense probability of collecting, preserving and using water from the rain in Nepal. He, then, informed that the Government of Nepal has been putting all possible efforts to meet the daunting task of providing access to safe water to all citizens by 2017. He requested the countries in the region to join hands in making concerted efforts to promote co-operation in tapping rainwater for mutual and multiple benefits.

At the meeting, the secretaries, senior policy makers and officials of the participating SAARC countries shared their field experiences and research results on technical, social, ecological and economic aspects of RWH, and discussed to explore the potential of using rainwater for drinking, groundwater recharge and for other domestic applications. The current policies and guidelines adopted in the regional countries were also discussed upon. In addition, discussions were also held on very important aspects of RWH like the water quality, private sector participant among others.

In addition to the discussions on different aspects of RWH, the participants also had the opportunity of observing some demonstrative activities on RWH in Kathmandu. Out of the seven sites selected for the field visit, five sites were established with support from UN-HABITAT. The participants were impressed with the initiatives of the local community and the enthusiasm shown by them in preserving their traditional water management systems where they are actively involved in capturing rainwater in augmenting the groundwater table.

The meeting concluded on the third day with 9-point recommendation that has advised the regional countries to keep indigenous knowledge and skills in consideration while designing and constructing rainwater harvesting system. It has also suggested to form the South Asia Networking Center for regional cooperation for rainwater harvesting. The recommendation has also emphasized the Private Public Partnership (PPP) to explore cost-effective option of rainwater harvesting so as to enhance sustainability of water supply services in the region.

The recommendation was handed over to Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Physical Planning and Works Mr. Bijay Kumar Gachedar at the closing ceremony of the meeting. Addressing the function, he said that the rainwater could play an important role to enhance water security both in rural and urban areas. He said that the government would continue to work to provide safe water supply for all.

An exhibition on RWH and other water related issues had also been organized during the same event. A photo exhibition reflecting different technologies of rainwater harvesting was also organized supported by UN-HABITAT and GUTHI. The best three photos selected through viewers votes were awarded by Mr. Gachedar at the closing function.

UN News

Bridge Builds connections in Humla



Rulmi villagers celebrate after completing the bridge construction. Photo: WFP

Kathmandu, 30 July: "Last year one of my friend fell in the river and drowned while he was going to school", Basanta Thapa, recalls sadly. "We had to cross the river holding a rope, which the girls could not do'' he added.

Basanta lives in Rilmu village, but studies in class 10 at Surgodaya Higher Secondary School which is across the Dhakani River in Shreenagar, Humla. During monsoon students of Rilmu village were not able to attend school as there was no bridge to cross the river. Several students were compelled to drop out of school because they were absent during the entire monsoon season.

Students were not the only ones to suffer. Because there was no bridge, the arrival of the monsoon meant that villagers from Rilmu lost access for months on end to critical services in Shreenagar like the health post, agricultural services and markets.

WFP in collaboration with its implementing partners, The Mountain Institute (TMI) and Himalaya Conservation and Development Association (HCDA), supported the local community in constructing a 10 meter wooden bridge on the Dhakani River. Under WFP's food-for-work activity 132 households constructed the bridge. Each participant received 40kgs of rice and 5kgs of lentils for their work.

"Now we can go to school even during the rainy season when the river is flooded'', said Basant Thapa, with a smile on his face. Since the completion of the bridge, 11 girls from Rimlu village have also enrolled themselves in the school

Life is much easier now for Rilmu residents who no longer have to risk their lives by crossing a raging river to get access to basic services or markets. Now that the bridge has been completed, people of Rilmu can reach Shreenagar in only two hours which has greatly improved their ability to transport essential commodities into the village.

"It is hard to believe that something so small as a 10 meter bridge can change the lives of so many people in so many ways. It really is a lifeline for our community," explained Basant.

Rulmi villagers celebrate after completing the bridge construction.

UN News

HIV/AIDS Awareness raising campaign



A person sharing his experience.
Photo: UNV

Kathmandu, 30 July: The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme in Nepal in collaboration with the United Youth and Youth Action of Nepal successfully completed a HIV/AIDS awareness raising campaign on 24&25 July 2009. The preliminary findings in consultation with the UNAIDS reveled that, although most of the trends of HIV infections are around the Terrai regions of Nepal (along the Indian border), new trend on HIV infections are seen developing in Youth, especially at the University level. The primary target groups of this campaign were the residents, especially the youth of Koteshwor slum, one of the many slum areas in Kathmandu where information on HIV/AIDS is presumed to be limited. By the nature of its environments we presumed that many of the residents would be illiterate and uneducated.

The secondary target groups were the youth Volunteers, for the very reason that they were going to Universities. Assistances from other UN affiliated organizations such as UNAIDS, UNDPAIDS , UNFPA, UNMIN and National Centre for AIDS and STD control in Nepal were also extended for this project, especially in sharing information materials and logistical support. The United Youth and Youth Action are few of the many government affiliated youth organizations in Nepal. They recruit and mobilize Volunteers who are enrolled in Universities and other institutions for community services. The Youth Action Volunteers are exclusively trained and equipped with very effective and interactive training programs on HIV/ AIDS awareness by the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) in Nepal.

The training entailed six modules, whereby each module dealt with different aspects of HIV/AIDS. It included the following modules: Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs); HIV Transmission and Prevention; Protection; My body; You & me – Gender; and My Life – Solidarity. The groups were equally divided into different modules and after 15 minutes the groups were rotated and eventually all the groups touched up on all six modules.

In order to make this training lively, group points were given for their right answers and every group participated very enthusiastically to score enough points to stand first, for which small prizes were awarded at the end. The United Youth and her Volunteers were given the task to facilitate this program as a measure to build their capacities under the guidance of UNV Programme.

The United Youth contacted the Youth Action of Nepal for their support in providing the trainings on HIV/AIDS awareness. To which the Youth Action Volunteers had responded enthusiastically and which also subsequently resulted in building strong social bond between these two organizations and their Volunteers. Two HIV infected individuals were requested to come and share their experiences with the participants. It was an emotional confrontation by the

female infected individual and was very warmly welcomed by the female crowd. They later ended up group hugging the infected woman. Similarly for the male, an HIV infected father of two healthy children was asked many questions by the male crowed and later hailed for his bravery and willingness to come and talk to them. At the end of the training, more than 200 residents including both male and female were directly reached and trained and more are expected to be reached through these informed participants.

For cultural sensitivity reasons separate trainings were carried out for male and female. Pre and post surveys for this campaign were also carried out. All the participants felt that it was a very informative and useful training and requested if such trainings can be carried out in health and sanitations in the future. We can proudly say that more than 200 people of Nepal are now safe from contracting HIV/AIDS. This program was covered by a local radio station called Mirmire.



Participants in the programme.
Photo: UNV

UN News

UNV Nepal: World Environment Day

Kathmandu, 31 July: On 5th June, 2009, "World Environment Program" was held in Kirtipur, suburb of Kathmandu in Nepal, on the occasion of UN World Environment Day.

UNV Nepal Country Office is supporting local initiatives to promote volunteerism in Nepal and this event is one of the activities for which UNV has provided financial support in line with UNV's slogan "Volunteering for Our Planet".

Local organisations and groups including "Returned United Nations Volunteers Association of Nepal" (RUNVAN), and "Friends of RUNVAN" as well as local women's groups were some of the active supporters for the programme.
On the day, the participants gathered in front of a local school in Panga ward in Kirtipur and started cleaning the neighborhood area. Then, the participants joined in a rally and marched around the local area led by local marching 'band', carrying banners and chanting slogans to deliver messages for raising awareness of environment issues and climate change.

The rally returned to assemble for the public speeches. Programme coordinators, representatives of participating organizations, local political party leaders, official of municipal government, and other invited guests delivered speeches to appeal for actions to protect our environment. Mr. Christian Simmelkiaer, UNV Nepal Programme Officer, conveyed a special message from UN Secretary General for World Environment Day in his speech. The program successfully ended with the closing remark by the President of Program in applause of the participants and the guests.

Reported by: Yoshie Hayakawa (UNV Associate Programmed Officer, Nepal)



UNV Programme Officer Mr. Christian Simmelkiaer delivering a public speech on environment. Photo: UNV



Participants from local women's groups in the rally. Photo: UNV

UNIC briefs Japanese Students

Kathmandu 24 July: UNIC National Information Officer Mr. Ram Babu Shah briefed a 6-member visiting team of Japanese nursing school students of UN activities in Nepal consisting of developmental, Humanitarian and UN's assistance to the peace process in Nepal. The team was led by Mr. Atsushi Suhara, program officer of ADRA Japan.



UNIC National Information Officer briefing about UN in Nepal to nursing school students from Japan. Photo: UNIC

UN News

UNAIDs Updates



Dear UN colleagues,

I had an idea about writing about the HIV strategy in Nepal when a friend of mine asked me what the best way to protect oneself from HIV was. If I had to choose one way to protect myself I would say condoms. Use condoms when having sex. Period. Specially if you are having more than one partner. You will not only protect yourself but also your partners. Condoms do not only protect against HIV but also against other sexually transmitted diseases as well as unwanted pregnancies.

Why Condoms?



Conclusive evidence from extensive research shows that correct and consistent condom use significantly reduces the risk of HIV transmission and that the male latex condom is the single, most efficient, available technology to reduce the sexual transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. To put this into plain English if you use a condom when having sex you are safe, not only from HIV but also from other sexually transmitted diseases.

So, let's be honest as well. Some people say that condoms reduce pleasure when having sex. This is partly true, some people do feel less pleasure but with the new condoms, like the one being distributed throughout the UN restrooms, this loss of pleasure is minimized.

If you look at this from a long term perspective, is the amount of pleasure being reduced to you worthwhile if you are infected by a sexually transmitted disease? I don't think so.

If your partner does not understand why you should use a condom take time to talk about it with him/her about the benefits of using a condom. Make sure that your condoms have not expired (the best before date is on the condom wrap) and make sure that the packet is intact, that there are no holes or tears in the packet. It is worth that little extra hassle to put on a condom, for your safety and for your partners safety….
Remember, it is not up to a man or a woman whether to use a condom or not. It is up to YOU! If you are a man or a woman you have the equal right to be safe and use a condom.

If you are unsure of how to use a condom, please contact me or ask when the next UNCARES training for UN staff takes place.

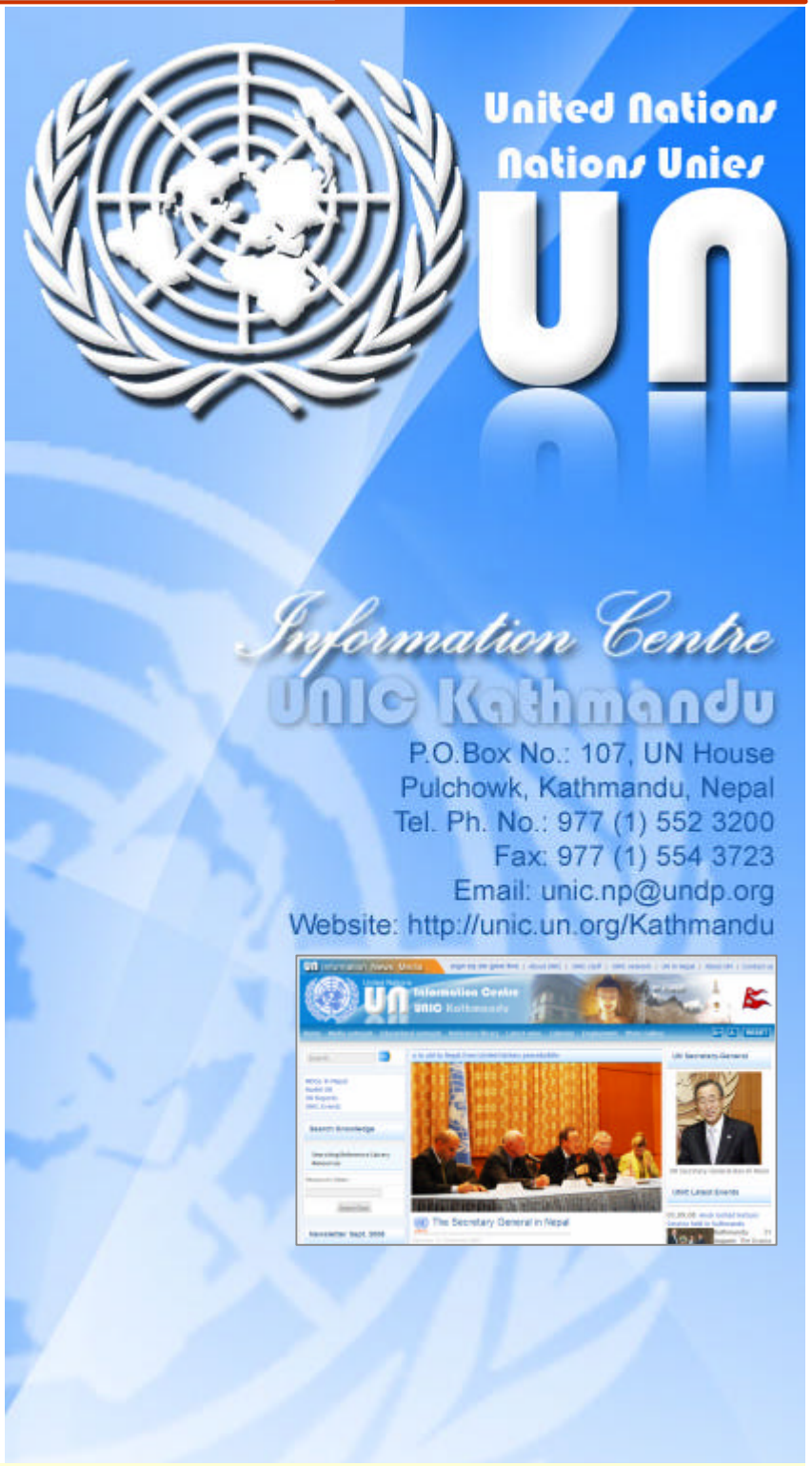
Till then, be safe and don't forget to use a condom!
Jan-Marcus (Masse), on Hellstromj@unaids.org.

UN Resource

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UNIC Kathmandu in Brief

UNIC Kathmandu is located in the UN House where most of the UN agencies in Nepal are also located. UNIC has a same entrance for visitors to facilitate their access into the Centre - be it to consult the reference library; to attend press conferences or for seeking information on UN related issues. UNIC undertakes extensive press activities, such as organizing press conferences for visiting UN officials, and for other UN agencies located in Nepal. It helps to prepare joint statements for the UN Country Team on various important issues and disseminates statements of the UN Secretary-General and other press releases/news/articles/reports coming from UN Headquarters. It is fully accessible to media persons and visitors during office hours.

In its constant endeavor to upgrade its service delivery with new and innovative approach through recent Information Technology, UNIC Kathmandu has implemented the electronics library system with internet facility to visitors as well as e-Catalogue for fast and efficient tracking of available contents in reference library. This catalogue is available online for home users as well as for other individuals.